

## Letter from Alexander Graham Bell, May 12, 1898

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Last Wednesday, May 6th, I witnessed a very remarkable experiment with Professor Langley's aerodrome on the Potomac River; indeed, it seemed to me that the experiment was of such historical importance that it should be made public.

I am not at liberty to give an account of all the details, but the main facts I have Professor Langley's consent for giving you, and they are as follows:

The aerodrome or “flying machine” in question was of steel, driven by a steam engine. It resembled an enormous bird, soaring in the air with extreme regularity in large curves, sweeping steadily upward in a spiral path, the spirals with a diameter of perhaps 100 yards, until it reached a height of about 100 feet in the air at the end of a course of about half a mile, 4 B 2 when the steam gave out, the propellers which had moved it stopped, and then, to my further surprise, the whole, instead of tumbling down, settled as slowly and gracefully as it is possible for any bird to do, touched the water without any damage, and was immediately picked out and ready to be tried again.

A second trial was like the first, except that the machine went in a different direction, moving in one continuous gentle ascent as it swung around in circles like a great soaring bird. At one time it seemed to be in danger as its course carried it over a neighboring 4½B wooded promontory, but apprehension was immediately allayed as it passed 25 or 30 feet above the tops of the highest trees there, and ascending still further, its steam finally gave out again, and it settled into the waters of the river, not quite a quarter of a mile from the point at which it arose.

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No one could have witnessed these experiments without being convinced that the practicability of mechanical flight had been demonstrated.

Yours very truly, Alexander Graham Bell 1331 Connecticut Avenue Washington, D. C.,  
May 12, 1896.